

Community Engagement Policy

A. Rationale and Foundations

Engaging the community in the improvement of the DC Public Schools is a critical part of our goal to dramatically increase student achievement and maintain the results of long-term, sustainable reforms in future years. DCPS students deserve the attention, commitment and support of the community just as school reform benefits from the wisdom and investment of community stakeholders.

From academics and community engagement to facilities and operations, all of the DC Public Schools goals and priorities are grounded in six core beliefs:

- We believe that all children, regardless of background or circumstance, can achieve at the highest levels.
- We believe that achievement is a function of effort, not innate ability.
- We believe that we have the power and the responsibility to close the achievement gap.
- We believe that our schools must be caring and supportive environments.
- We believe that it is critical to engage our students' families and communities as valued partners.
- We believe that our decisions at all levels must be guided by robust data.

The Community Engagement Policy also aligns with and reinforces the Five-Year Action Plan of the District of Columbia Public Schools and the **Effective Schools Framework**, which includes expectations for community engagement at the school level.

The **Effective Schools Framework** is a blueprint outlining the six key elements of an effective school, and principals spent the 2008 – 2009 school year acclimating to the Framework. The 2009 – 2010 school year marks the first year they are being held accountable for building the Framework in their schools.

- **Element 1: Teaching and Learning**
Teachers work together to plan instruction that holds students to high standards and expectations for achievement, and gives them the skills to meet those expectations.
- **Element 2: Leadership**
The school leader fully understands his or her role as the leader of instruction for the school. The principal creates a vision aligned to district goals that is individualized to meet the needs of the school community.
- **Element 3: Job-Embedded Professional Development**
High quality professional development happens at the school. It fits with district and local school goals, is driven by data, and meets teachers where they are, individualized to their subject areas and the challenges they face.

- **Element 4: Resources**

Instruction and student achievement drive the way the school allocates its resources. Funding, staff, materials and time are distributed according to the teaching and learning needs at the school.

- **Element 5: Safe and Effective Learning Environment**

Policies, procedures and practices support a safe environment that communicates high expectations, mutual respect and a focus on teaching and learning.

- **Element 6: Family and Community Engagement**

School staff communicates well with families and community members, supporting them to know their important roles in creating effective learners and schools. The school invests families and community members in that work.

B. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the school district's goals, expectations, and responsibilities in engaging the community to increase student achievement in the DC Public Schools.

C. Meeting Our Goals: Scope of Implementation

DC Public Schools will apply this policy when considering changing an existing policy, putting a new policy in place, or taking any other action that will have significant impact on students and their families. Examples of these instances are revision of the student discipline code, the development of school score cards, Chancellor Rhee's ongoing meetings with teachers, secondary school transformation, and development of the school calendar.

There are a few instances in which a different set of engagement protocols is dictated by law or by the necessity of gathering input from researchers and experts in education. Examples of these are school closings, the principal hiring process, and a new method of calculating graduation rates.

D. Meeting Our Goals: Best Implementation Practices

DCPS will solicit input from community members in every ward in the District of Columbia, representing a broad spectrum of potentially impacted stakeholders--DCPS students, parents and graduates; parents and families of children who do not attend DCPS; staff who work hard and are committed to the outcomes they can produce; and community members who believe in the importance of a strong DC Public Schools system.

While DCPS has engaged in many of these practices, the policy outlined here will more formally ensure that a broad range of stakeholder perspectives is sought, received, and considered--and that the impact of such input is made clear.

The Phases:

1. DC Public Schools presents the issue or topic for which community engagement is sought, and collaborates with small groups of internal and external stakeholders to consider and explore the topic in anticipation of putting a draft of the issue before the larger community.
2. DCPS and this early collaborative group shares, seeks input, and discusses the draft with the community in order to gather response and insight. This can include:
 - Conducting stakeholder surveys on web, paper, and/or via phone to inform deliberations and decision making
 - Holding face-to-face focus groups, with end-users and other involved parties
 - Reaching out to expert groups or investigating research results provided by other experts
 - Hosting community forums and/or meetings across the city
 - Meet individually with stakeholders beyond the working group
 - Use dcps.dc.gov to post process to date, Frequently Asked Questions, meeting notes, project calendar
 - Record and categorize primary questions, recommendations received, and DCPS response
 - Create final draft

At the end of this phase, initiative draft is ready for broadest public comment.

3. Share the draft with the community, along with responses to the primary concerns with plans and plans for meeting potential challenges raised by the community.
 - Post and work to draw public attention to final draft. Notify impacted parents and families and make draft publicly available to parents and families as well as all stakeholders.
 - Collect last round of public comment, questions, suggested refinements
 - Announce final initiative with a history of engagement process attached
 - Hold meeting (s) to inform public, answer questions and outline next steps
 - Implement initiative

E. Responsibility and Accountability

The Chancellor holds DCPS' Office of Family and Public Engagement accountable for the management and growth of community engagement initiatives. In turn, the chief of each department is accountable for using this policy and practices in order to build appropriate and far-reaching community engagement practices into the work of his or her group. The Office of Family and Public Engagement is responsible for driving and supporting the planning and execution of community engagement across all DCPS departments, working with content experts from each one; keeping an inventory of such activities, and making recommendations to the chancellor to ensure the effectiveness and growth of DCPS community engagement.